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# Victory through the ballots or violence to victory? An assessment of electoral violence in post-independence Nigeria

**Egobueze Anthony**

**ABSTRACT**

This paper investigated electoral violence in post-independence Nigeria and held that the most accepted means of changing government is through elections. The importance attached to elections globally suggests that its successful conduct is critical to the advancement of democracy. However, in Nigeria and many advancing democracies, elections rather being won through the ballots have been manipulated by some political elites and their cronies, leading to violence of all sorts. This paper therefore assesses the historicity of electoral violence in Nigeria from independence to date. Methodologically, data was sourced through secondary sources and analyzed through content analysis. The paper observed weak institution, desire of the elites to control the polity for economic advantage and mass poverty as the reasons for electoral violence in Nigeria and recommended the implementation of Justice Uwais Electoral Panel Report, amongst others as key panacea to curbing the violence.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Ballots, Election, Independence, Post, Victory, Violence

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Globally, the most accepted means of changing the government is through elections. Elections give legitimacy to government (Istifamus, 2003) and engenders political participation as a significant pillar of democracy. The history of modern democracy in Nigeria has been generally influenced by one form of violence or another. Some of this violence arose due to poor electioneering process. The conduct of elections has been one of the major obstacles to democratization in Nigeria. Nigeria's inability to conduct credible elections has hindered effective democratic development. Over the years, Nigerians have continued to be apprehensive over crowing insecurity associated to election because of the inability of the State to conduct peaceful, free, fair, open elections whose results are widely accepted and respected across the country (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017; Igbozor, 2010; Osumah and Aghemelo, 2010). Since independence to date, the electoral process in has caused increasingly anxiety, tension, brouhahas and bitter controversies and grievances due to the twin

problems of mass violence and fraud (Gberie, 2011), Mbah et al., (2019) and Ogele, (2020) agree with the above thought.

Twenty years down the line since the return to democracy, the political landscape of Nigeria is yet to show clear evidence of democratic consolidation. Ironically, paupers of yesterday have risen to financial giants today and shakers of the political space, this has made the quest for power, a route many men must follow to 'survive' quickly in the country. This quest by most of the political leaders and their petty henchmen to acquire state power at any cost and hold - on to it perpetually, have not only created different forms of violence, but has equally turned the electorates and the masses at large into the locution political cow that are unceasingly milked to death or worst still, slaughtered on a regular basis, to ensure that power must be captured and sustained. The polity is characterized by human rights abuses, corruption, thuggery, anti-party activities, godfatherism, violence, ethnic and religious skirmishes continue persistently.

Election is a key feature of democracy and gives the people the right to political participation in government (Egobueze, 2020; Diamond, 2008; Alapiki, 2004). As it were, Nigeria attempts to achieve good democratic culture has been challenging due to the growing tension and conflicts that arise from elections in the country. The historicity of the entire republic shows that the poor management of election has been the harbingers of most of the conflicts which is a threat to democratic consolidation. Elections are significantly democratic if they are participatory, competitive, free, fair and legitimate. Nigeria's journey through election has been albatross. Since the independence to inception of Nigeria's 4th Republic, the conduct of general elections has remained very disturbing, alarming and worrisome. Various institutions and international observers have characterized the Nigerian elections as rigged and marred by violence. Even late President Musa Umaru Yar' Adua conceded this fact during his 2007, May 29, Presidential inauguration speech.

To change this ugly narrative, the need for credible electoral system is crucial for the sustenance of democracy (Nnoli, 2003). However, this has not been the case since the inception of this democratic government. In fact, since Nigeria became independent in 1960 till date, general elections in the country have been characterized with violence and electoral fraud. Khonart, (2004) observed that of the first election of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic was merely accepted in order to allow the military government to get out of office. The elections of 2003 are comparable to those of 1964 and 1983 that led to widespread violence in the form of inter-party clashes, political assassinations and community unrest in already volatile areas. Similarly, the 2007 general elections were not different from others preceding it.

During the preparations to the 2007 elections, the political troposphere was very edgy. Hate speeches were made and primordial sentiments awoken. President Obasanjo did not help matters as he openly stated that, the 2007 election was '*a do or die affair*' Egobueze, (2017). This aligned with the thoughts of Ezirim and Mbah, (2014) argued "the political violence that erupted in all these elections progressively had high ethnic tones as there were ethnic insurgencies during the various elections, such that between June and August 2006, three gubernatorial candidates were assassinated (p. 5)". Based on the above, this study examined the background to electoral violence in Nigeria and provides suggestions on how to curb such violence.

## 2. SYNOPTIC HISTORICITY OF ELECTIONS IN COLONIAL NIGERIA

Elections were introduced in Nigeria by the Cliffordian Constitution of 1921 as a reform measure to get Nigerians involved in the democratic process. This was a fall-out to demands made by the nationalists. Constitutional reforms in the colonial entity therefore provided the space for democratic consolidation with election as a key pillar. "Constitutional reforms were the instruments through which elections were introduced and expanded during the colonial period (Ujo, 2003)."

Sir Hugh Clifford's Constitution of 1922 introduced the elective principle, which was used for the elections in 1923. However, there were conditions to be met by the electorate for the elections conducted in 1923, 1928, 1933 and 1938 such as one-year residency and gross annual income of £100 (Bamidele and Ikubaje, 2004). Despite its restrictive nature, the constitutional reforms of 1922 engendered and stimulated the political space in the country and it became a Renaissance for the establishment of political parties of Nigerian origin. Some of these parties were Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), among others (Ngou, 1989; Dare, 1989). Until the 1940s, the NNDP and NYM controlled the political space and dominated elections in these areas that had franchise. "While the NNDP dominated the elections in 1923, 1928 and 1933, NYM defeated NNDP in 1938 and dominated the polity until the introduction of another Constitution in 1946 (Keay and Thomas, 1986)." Albeit, the 1922 Constitution did not provide the necessary panacea for democratic consolidation, because the elections were limited to a microcosm of the Country, only Lagos and Calabar.

Indeed, the electoral reform only enfranchised men, creating gender biases (Akanji, 2014; Osaghae, 2002; Akinboye and Anifowose, 1999; Keay and Thomas, 1986). Due to this shortcoming, the Constitution was highly criticized and changed in 1946 by colonial government through Sir Arthur Richard. The 1946 Constitution created a Central Legislative Council, dichotomized the

Country into three unequal regions and established a regional legislature (Egobueze, 2020; Akanji, 2014; Bamidele and Ikubaje, 2004; Keay and Thomas, 1986) among others. Like the preceding Constitution, this Constitution did not guaranty adequate franchise in Nigeria, it disenfranchised women and un-propertied men in Lagos and Calabar; this was evidence in the elections that took place between 1946 and 1951. This led to growing agitation for full political liberalism that would guarantee equitable representation for most Nigerian irrespective of sex, race or properties, hence, the introduction in 1951 of another Constitution which replaces that of 1946.

The 1951 Constitution was not an end to the agitations, but it broadened political participation by increasing the number of representatives to the Central Legislative Council. It also provided some legislative power to the regional legislatures (Akanji, 2014; Keay and Thomas, 1986). This stimulated local participation in governance and enhanced the formation of political parties across the country like the Action Group (AG) and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC), both established in 1951; the Middle Belt Peoples' Party (MBPP), in 1953; and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), in 1954 (Ngou, 1989; Dare, 1989). These political parties and others existing at the time changed the face of elections and reinvented political participation in Nigeria (Akanji, 2014). The 1951 Constitution increased regionalism and enhanced ethnicity, sectionalism and deepened tribal politics in the country. Akanji, (2014) opined that these tendencies posed a serious challenge to Nigeria's unity. To arrest this imbroglio, the colonial government led by Oliver Lyttleton introduced the 1954 Constitution to remedy most of the defects in the 1951 Constitution. The 1954 Constitution however resonated the principle of direct election and further devolved the electoral process. The Constitution guaranteed relative electoral autonomy to the regions and broadened political participation.

In 1959 elections, the NCNC and Action Group fully involved themselves in ethnic mobilization and campaign of calumny to galvanize support to their members. Therefore, it is clear that ethnic and regional politics in Nigeria had their origin from the colonial era. These ethnic regional cleavages, historically and tenaciously encouraged electoral violence in the struggle to acquire or retain power. The results of the elections showed that out of a total of 312 seats in the Federal House, the NPC won 134, the NCNC 81, the AG 73, Northern Elements' Progressive Union (NEPU) 8, the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) one and independent candidates 15 seats. In the East, the NCNC won 58 seats and the AG 14; while the NDC won a seat. In the West, the AG won 33 seats, the NCNC 21 and the independent 8 seats. In the North, the NPC won 134 seats, the AG 25, NEPU 8 and Independents 7 (Table 1). The seeds of ethnic and regional politics were sown and nurtured by the Nigerian leaders and the British especially from the forties took a firm root and nurtured it to bear fruits. "The three dominant political parties, especially the AG and the NCNC were able in these particular elections to win seats outside their regional bases only in the minority ethnic areas where they encouraged agitations against their governments for regional status (Nnadozie, 2007)."

**Table 1** The Result of the 1959 Federal Elections into the House of Representatives showing Party Strength in the Regions

Political Party	Eastern Region	Northern Region	Western Region	Fed.	Total
AG	14	25	33	1	73
NCNC	58	0	21	2	81
NPC	0	134	0	0	134
NEPU	0	8	0	0	8
NDC	1	0	0	0	1
Independent	0	7	8	0	15
Total	73	174	62	3	312

Source: (Nnadozie, 2007)

### **An assessment of electoral violence in post - colonial Nigeria**

According to Ogunna, (2003), electoral process is alien to the developing nations. Elections are designed to produce popular rulers. This can be attained only through free and fair election. Elections in developing nations like Nigeria are characterized by a variety of electoral malpractices which make the elections mere mockery of democracy. He further observed that the widespread election malpractices create situations of political tension, conflicts and violence. For instance, the Federal Election of 1964 and the Western Nigerian Elections of 1965 resulted in gross electoral malpractices which led to political conflicts and violence of great magnitude that ultimately gave effect to the first military coup in Nigeria in January 1966.

The 1966 coup led to thirteen years of military rule which terminated with the return of democracy in 1979. When the ban on politics was lifted in 1978, the military introduced a transition programme (1975-79) for a return to civil rule. As a result, about nineteen political associations emerged and applied to the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) for registration. Of these number, only five. Namely - the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party

(NPP), the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP) and the People's Redemption Party (PRP)-were adjudged by FEDECO as having met the criteria especially, having membership of at least two-thirds of the States of the federation and consequently got registered as political parties. The idea was to ensure that political parties that emerged this time around were national in character (Nnadozie, 2007).

In comparative terms, it could be stated that contrary to the bitterness, boycotts and electoral malpractices, which characterized the 1964/5 Federal elections, the 1979 general elections were held with minimum electoral violence and rancor. Though there were usual accusations and counter-accusations of rigging and printing of ballot papers from political opponents, these were generally settled within the confines of law courts and election tribunals set up for the purpose. The 1979 Constitution marked a major paradigm shift in Nigeria's political experience. It introduced a Presidentialism that replaced the Parliamentary system inherited from the British at the inception of independence in 1960. The constitution provided for the president as the chief executive of the Country and a Vice president who assisted the President and acted as President in his absence. At the sub-national level, it established the office of the Governor, assisted by a Deputy Governor. Results of the elections in the States confirmed the ethnic colouration of the parties. A breakdown of states controlled by the parties is given below:

**Table 2** 1979 General Elections winning Parties in States

Party	States Controlled
NPN	Bauchi, Benue, Cross-River, Kwara, Niger, Rivers and Sokoto
UPN	Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Bendel
NPP	Anambra, Imo and Plateau
GNPP	Borno and Gongola
PRP	Kano and Kaduna

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from FEDECO, Lagos.

The pattern of voting was finally reflected in the presidential Elections. Of the 47,433,757 registered voters, 16,846,633 Nigerians voted in the 11 August, 1979 Presidential Elections as follows:

**Table 3** 1979 Presidential Elections Results

Candidate	Party	Votes Polled	Cast Percentage
Shehu Shagari	NPN	5,688,857	33.8
O. Awolowo	UPN	4,916,651	29.2
N. Azikwe	NPP	2,822,523	16.7
W. Ibrahim	GNPP	1,686,489	10.3
Aminu Kano	PRP	1,732,113	10.0

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from FEDECO, Lagos

Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari, of the NPN was declared the winner of the Presidential Elections on 26 September 1979 after the legal battle over the interpretation of the exact meaning of two – third of nineteen by the Supreme Court of Nigeria. The suit was instituted by Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the UPN. Chief Awolowo contended that Alhaji Shagari could not have won the elections because he did not muster the 25 percent of votes cast in 13 States of the Federation. Justice Fatai Williams swore in Shagari as the President of Nigeria on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1979. The leadership of government was handed over to Shagari by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, the out-going Head of State.

The 1983 election was among the most chaotic ever held in the country (Iyayi, 2007). Osaghae, (2002) opines that the election belonged to William Riker's 'critical' elections. The overall complexion of the election was zero-sum calculations and actions and there were accusations and counter-accusations from the political parties of intimidation and thuggery. The electoral outcome was controversial, yet Shagari was sworn – in as President. The political brouhahas led to military interregnum that took the country through her longest transition which ended up in running the country to the brink of disintegration. The transition content and timeframe were tinkered with several military governments. This situation suggests that the process was largely predetermined by the regime. Iyayi, (2007) observed that the elections of 1992-1993 were habitually delayed, annulled, suspended and adjusted to produce a predetermined result by the Military. At the height of the tinkering, government decreed two 'test tube' parties (Osaghae op. cite.). These were Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Congress (NRC). The 1983 election was also characterized with high-level of electoral manipulation, rigging, ballot box snatching and intimidation which was a replica of 1964

election. The ruling party used the power of incumbency to commit massive fraud and rigging against the opposition (Umaru, 2003). See the table below for details of the States controlled by each of the political parties.

**Table 4** States Controlled by Parties in 1983 elections

Party	States Controlled
NPN	Anambra, Bauchi, Bendel, Benue, Borno, Cross-River, Gongola, Kaduna, Niger, Oyo, Rivers, Sokoto
UPN	Lagos, Ogun, Kwara, Ondo
NPP	Imo and Plateau
GNPP	Nil
PRP	Kano
NAP	Nil

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from FEDECO, Lagos.

In the Presidential Elections, Shehu Shagari of the NPN again emerged winner defeating Awolowo (UPN), Nnamdi Azikiwe (NPP), Aminu Kano (PRP), Waziri Ibrahim (GNPP) and Tunji Braithwaite (NAP). Due to the flaws that characterized the election, on 31 December 1983, the military *coup d'état* again aborted Nigeria's democratic governance.

The 1993 General Elections was like a genuine attempt to break out of the jinx in the use of the electoral process to elect ethnic and sectional leaders in the 1993 general elections. The preparation and process of the elections was midwife by the Military Government of General Ibrahim Babangida in one of the longest transition programme in Nigeria. "After several cancellations of aspects of political transitional programme, especially those dealing with the formation and registration of political parties, two parties - the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) which were contraptions of the military government-finally emerged and contested the elections (Nnadozie, 2007)."

It is pertinent to make some observations about the voting procedure used in this particular election - the option A4 - as it represented a great departure from the conventional voting procedure which has been in use not only in Nigeria, but also in most liberal democracies in the world. The option A4 is an autochthonous invention and a unique voting process which required voters to queue up behind the photographs of the candidates and political parties of their choice and after which the counting of the votes for each candidate is done by the presiding electoral officer in-charge of the polling booth in the presence of everybody; with the result announced immediately on the spot in each of the polling booth. This is a voting procedure which in spite of its shortcomings (such as exposing the identity of the voters) appeared to have taken care of most of the previously experienced electoral malpractices which has marred elections in the country. Moreover, the experiment appeared to be popular among Nigerians and therefore generally accepted by the people. Perhaps this may partly explain why the 1993 general elections have been acclaimed by both national and international observers as the most genuine, freest and fairest in the historicity of elections in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, after the successful conclusion of the first and second phases of the elections which led to the inauguration of governments at the State and Local levels, the collation and announcement of the result of the presidential election, the final phase of the seven-year transition programme was aborted by the military president, General Babangida, when he annulled the results of election generally acclaimed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the flag bearer of the SDP. "That singular act appeared to have set Nigeria and Nigerians back not only to the electoral drawing table in particular, but also to the political drawing in general (Nnadozie, 2007)".

After so many unfulfilled promises and political maneuvering by the military and also following persistent and dogged campaign and struggle by the civil society to get the military back to the barracks, Nigerians were once again permitted to exercise their franchise in the 1999 general elections. Three parties were registered for the process; these were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All People's Party (APP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD). The elections were flawed with irregularities and other anti-election behaviours. The PDP was declared the winner of the Presidential election and the party won majority seats in the Legislature and 21 gubernatorial seats. The other two parties, the APP and AD had 7 and 6 States Governors respectively elected in their platforms. It was however a sweet welcome to democratic rule which had been absent for sixteen years and the debacle of 1993. Nnadozie (2007) states that:

At the end of the day, Chief Obasanjo of the PDP was declared winner of the presidential elections and sworn in accordingly on 29 May, 1999. The PDP not only swept the states where it won in twenty four out of the thirty-six states of the federation, but also



had more than a comfortable majority in both Houses of the National Assembly. Detail of the Presidential election result is as provided in the table below:

**Table 5** 1999 Presidential Election Results

Candidate	Party (Coalition)	No of Votes	% Of Votes
Olusegun Obasanjo	PDP	18,738,154	62.78%
Olu Fale	AD-APP	11,110,287	37.22%

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from African Elections Database, 1999

Similarly, the PDP won more seats in the National Assembly as reflected in the table below:

**Table 6** 1999 National Assembly Election Results

Political Party	SENATE		HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	
	No of seats	% Of votes	No of seats	% Of votes
People's Democratic Party	59	56.4%	206	57.1%
All People's Party	29	31.2%	74	30.5%
Alliance for Democracy	20	12.4%	68	12.4%
Vacant/Undeclared seats	1	0	12	
Total	109		360	

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from African Elections Database, 1999

The 2003 election was marked by the proliferation of political parties after a Supreme Court's ruling removing the cap on the requirements for party registration. The parties that had some level of success in the elections include; People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), 'United Nigeria People's Party (UNPP), National Democratic Party (NDP), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), People's Redemption Party (PRP). There was a host other parties that could not justify their registration. The election was described as "a coup *d'état* against the people (Iyayi, 2007)" because the PDP ingloriously swept almost every position, including the Presidency, majority seats in the legislatures at both the national and sub-national levels and 27 State Governorship positions. "Under the circumstances, the future and survival of democracy and democratic institutions is anybody's guess as they are permanently sitting on a keg of gunpowder (Nnadozie, 2007)." The result of the Legislative election into the National Assembly is shown in table seven and eight below:

**Table 7** Showing 2003 House of Representative Election Result

Political Party	No of votes	% of votes	No. of seats
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	15,927,807	54.49%	223
All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP)	8,021,531	27.44%	96
Alliance for Democracy (AD)	2,711,972	9.28%	34
United Nigeria People's Party (UNPP)	803,432	2.75%	2
National Democratic Party (NDP)	561,161	1.92%	1
All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)	397,147	1.36%	2
People's Redemption Party (PRP)	222,938	0.75	1
Others	587,082	2.01	0
Vacant	0	0	1

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from African Elections database, 2003.

**Table 8** 2003 Senate Election Results

Political Party	No of votes	% Of votes	No. of seats
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	15,585,583	53.69%	76
All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP)	8,091,783	27.87%	27
Alliance for Democracy (AD)	2,828,082	9.74%	6
United Nigeria People's Party (UNPP)	789,705	2.72%	0

National Democratic Party (NDP)	459,462	1.58%	0
All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)	429,073	1.48%	0
People's Redemption Party (PRP)	204,929	0.71	0
Others	641,535	2.21%	0

Source: Table constructed by the authors with data from African Elections database, 2003.

The General elections of 2007 were held for Presidential and National Assembly as well Governorship and State Houses of Assembly. Joshua, (2010) opined that the elections were historic and significant because "it was the very first time Nigeria successfully transited power from a civilian government to another. The singular importance of this comes from the fact that attempts to do so failed both in 1966 and 1983."

At the end of collation of the results, the PDP won the Presidential election as well as 28 Governorship contests, out of 36 States, 85 Senatorial seats in the 109 Upper House, 263 House of Representative seats in the 360 members lower legislative Chamber and a total of 714 seats across the states out of the 990 seats in the State Assemblies in the nation. The party also won 5 Area Council Chairmanship in the Federal Capital Territory and 34 Councillorship in the FCT, out of the 62 seats. The question that comes to mind at this juncture is "did the result reflect the wishes of Nigerians or the party won these supports through electoral fraud?" The election results remain very controversial and the elected President, noted that it was the most flawed, bedeviled with corruption. Thus, on assumption of office, he set up a Commission led by Justice Uwais to review Nigeria's election methodology.

The most violent elections in Nigeria were held in 2011. The leading presidential candidates were the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), retired General Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and Ibrahim Shekarau of the All-Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). The election witnessed monumental rigging and fraud, executive interference, and sponsored assassination. This election also was one of the few elections to be postponed due to poor logistic planning. "President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP won the election, defeating his closest rivals, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari of the CPC and Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the ACN. From the results released, Jonathan polled a total of 22,350,242 votes to beat Buhari, who had 11,914,953 to a distant second, while Ribadu of ACN polled 2,049,357. Shekarau of ANPP polled 1,624,543 votes.

The next general election was held in 2015. The conduct of the election witnessed improved process in the organization as well as improved legal. The election was hailed both nationally and internationally. Unlike the sore point of the 2011 election, this was ridden with violence that erupted at the close of the process in which 1000 lives were lost (IGC, 2007). In the history of Nigeria, the March 28th 2015 Presidential election was another milestone of strengthening democratic institution in the Country. In reviewing elections in Nigeria, it is apposite to state that there have been ten General Elections that took place since 1960 with two of them in the First Republic, two in the Second Republic, one in the Aborted Third Republic and five in the current Fourth Republic. However, what made the 2015 General Election unique are combinations of many factors such as the emergence of strong opposition political party that won an incumbent President in the Presidential election and the loss of some scores or heavy weights in politics at the Legislative elections. Indeed, the election was highly competitive. There were also structural and administrative improvements by the electoral commission, the INEC. Some critical factors that influenced the election include; the use of card reader and permanent voters' card (P.V.C), ethnicity, religion, the role of the press, security outfit, political parties, electoral body themselves, under age voting, integrity of the constant and external influences.

On the political party front, there was the merger of strong opposition parties including ACN, ANPP, CPC and a faction of APGA and new PDP to form a new party - the All-Progress Congress (APC) which emerged strong enough to challenge and defeat the PDP in the election (Adibe, 2015). The introduction of the card reader was a scientific and innovative approach in the 2015 election. It helped to minimize fraudulent practices like manipulation of names and figures and it enhanced voting stability and facilitated electoral statistics total number of registered voters, 67,422,005, total number of accredited voters 31,746,490, total number of valid votes, 28,587,564, total number of rejected votes, 844,519, total number of votes cast 29,432,083 (INEC, 2015).

The 2015 presidential election was bedeviled by intense ethnic and regional cleavages and primordial sentiments. The lingering North-South dichotomy still very evident during the 2015 Election with the North having an upper hand with majority Hausa/Fulani dominating and participating in the election, the South-east and South-south divide dominated by Christians and the Southwest being a combination of Muslim/Christian region and the election took place along this pattern in most cases. The General Election was believed to have witnessed the influence of money, incumbency power and other dominant factors (Adibe, 2015). The campaign was hot and aggressive all the ethnic group mobilized their people for the election, in the voting process, former president won in South-East, South-South while president Mohammed Buhari won in South-West, North-East, North-West and North-Central with 21 States while president Jonathan won in 16 states.

According to Dauda, (2015) it was observed that the violence that characterized the 2015 had been predictable. Leading to Election Day, there had been violent expressions of political rivalry among stake holders and agents of political parties leading to the use of thugs, arson, terrorism and other extreme criminal measures. The general elections of 2019 returned President Muhammadu Buhari elected to office for a second term and the sixth general election held in this Fourth Republic. A factsheet on the 2019 General Election indicates that about 84 million voters registered for the election and about 72 million voters collected their Permanent Voter Cards. There were also 91 registered political parties; 120 Accredited Domestic Observers and 36 Accredited Foreign Observers and 23,000 candidates that jostled for 1,558 positions.

There was widespread militarization of the society by those in power during elections which undermined the credibility of the elections. In essence, the incumbents' control and manipulate the electoral system to their advantage which eroded the credibility of 2019 general elections. The processes of conducting 2019 general elections were characterized by harassment and oppression of persons by the political office holders to those belonging to the opposition parties or considered to be critical of their mismanagement of electoral process with the use of law enforcement agencies. There was massive deployment of the Police and the Armed Forces which frightened and threatened voters. The 2019 general elections were adjudged to be worst in the history of fourth republic, because they were characterized by massive rigging, monetization, vote buying, assassination, political thuggery, sentiments, alleged issues of corrupt practices of electoral and judicial officers, deliberate disfranchisement of the voters, outright disregard for the rule of law, and brutality by the Security Agencies, amongst others.

### 3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Election is the most accepted means of changing the government. The importance attached to elections globally suggests that its success everywhere is important for the advancement of democracy. The colonial experience of Nigeria as historicized above suggests that electoral violence had its root from that epoch; due to the lopsided nature the colonial power divided the country, creating ethnic cleavages through regionalism. Ethnic sentimentalism became a primordial factor that shaped the electoral process, rather than meritocracy; the process created ethnic bigots that wielded strong influence. This ugly trend continued unabated in post-colonial Nigeria, due to the fact that election is seen a gateway to the acquisition of state power, which is prosperity in itself in Nigeria. Thus, they see political power as a means to the acquisition of economic power, which is achieved through primitive accumulation guided by corruption. This has continued unabated and has dampened Nigeria's external image and undermined development. This must stop.

To arrest this dangerous trend, the study proposes the following as necessary panacea: The implementation of Hon. Justice Uwais Electoral Panel's Report. Further amendment of the Electoral Act 2022 is recommended to provide for mobile courts that would try electoral offences. Some of the offences are vote buying, thugry, abuse of electoral process, brutality by security forces, culture of impunity; This would reduce high incidence of malpractices and unethical behaviours that characterized general elections within the period under review. In order to consolidate our democracy, the institutions that are charged with the responsibility of managing the election - INEC and SIECs should ensure that they implement the spirits of law setting up the Commissions. They should coalesce with relevant institutions that would lead to the persecution of offenders of the law. Better Voter Education: A cross-sectional study revealed that voters who have experienced threats of electoral violence at the polls were less likely to exercise their franchise during elections and this leads to apathy, consequently, the study recommends full voter education that would sensitize the citizenry on the dangers of electoral violence. This we believe, would encourage the voters to participate actively in the electoral process from the primaries, the campaigns, the main elections and the post-election period. Finally, Constitutional amendment is also recommended that would make political offices to be less financially enticing.

#### Informed consent

Not applicable.

#### Ethical approval

Not applicable.

#### Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.



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## Data and materials availability

All data associated with this study are present in the paper.

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